



Unsteady on your feet

There are many factors which may cause you to be unsteady on your feet. These could include loss of strength, poor balance, restricted movement of your joints and impaired vision. Some medications and health conditions can also affect your balance.

Speak to your doctor if you are concerned about how your health may be affecting your ability to walk. If your mobility needs are more complex a physiotherapist can recommend a specialised walking aid.

Getting an assessment

Selecting the correct walking aid can be a complex task. Which walking aid is chosen depends on where the person wants to use it (indoors or outdoors), what is making walking difficult for them (the health condition) and what activities they want to be able to do or continue to do (e.g. walk to the local shops).

Physiotherapists can complete a mobility assessment. They look at how you naturally walk and at which aid will help you if you are unsteady on your feet. A physiotherapist can recommend the most suitable walking aid for you, and will also be able to measure and determine the correct height of your walking aid.

Buying an inappropriate walking aid can make walking more difficult and increase the likelihood of falls or injury.

You can hire walking frames. This can be useful if someone needs a walking aid temporarily. Contact ILC Tas on 1300 885 886 for details.

Falls prevention programs

Falls prevention programs are designed to improve your strength and balance. They can help you become less reliant on a walking aid and to maintain your independence for longer. Programs are run by community physiotherapists in many places in Tasmania. Contact your local physiotherapist or ILC Tas for details of the program closest to you.



Walking aids

Walking sticks

A walking stick may assist you if you need only a small amount of extra support to walk. A physiotherapist can assist you to decide what height you require and on which side to use your walking stick.

Rubber ferrules: These are the rubber tips on the bottom ends of walking sticks. These need to be checked for wear and replaced when necessary.



Crutches

Crutches are generally used as a short term walking aid, but not always. They need to be adjusted to the right height for you and you should be shown how to use them correctly. You will need to see a physiotherapist to discuss whether this is the right option for you.



Walking frames

Four-wheel frames

To use a four wheel frame you need to have good balance and to be able to walk reasonably well, but need extra support over long distances.

These frames are suitable for both indoor and outdoor use. Four wheel walkers often have a seat and a basket. If you fill the basket with heavy items, it will make the frame more difficult to push. Four wheel frames fold so before use they need to be completely unfolded.

These frames also have brakes. You need to be able to lock the brakes to use the seat safely. There are different types of brakes:

1. Cable brakes (like bicycle brakes). You need to be able to squeeze a lever.
2. Push down brakes. You push down or lean on the frame to use these brakes. These brakes may be difficult to operate on slopes.

If you are not able to operate either of these styles you will need to see a physiotherapist or occupational therapist to assist you to decide on a more specialised braking system that is easy to use.



Two-wheel frames

You may find a two-wheel frame useful if you require constant support while walking and have difficulty with balance. Two-wheel frames are designed to be used at a slow steady pace. You also need to be shown by a physiotherapist how to use them correctly to gain maximum benefit from the frame.

They have two wheels at the front and either plastic glides ('skis') or rubber stoppers at the back. Stoppers can provide greater stability than glides but are difficult to use on carpet.

They are suitable for indoor use, but are not always suitable to use outside as they need a flat surface in order to slide. This type of frame can be lighter than a four-wheel frame. Some may fold for easier transport.



Pick-up frames

Pick-up frames may assist you if you require a lot of support while walking and have difficulty with balance. These have no wheels and are designed to be used at a slow steady pace over short distances. You should be shown how to use the frame correctly to gain the maximum benefit. These are only suitable for indoors or a very flat paved outdoor area.

This type of frame can be lighter than a four-wheel frame type. Some may fold for easier transport.



Height and use of walking aids

It is important that your walking aid is adjusted to the right height. Your physiotherapist can assist you to select the correct height of your walking aid. They can also show you how to use the walking aid correctly so that you can gain the maximum benefit.

Remember, when you stand up from a chair, to push up from the arms of the chair and then grasp your walking frame. Do not use the walking frame for support when standing up from chairs.

Points to Consider

How do I choose the correct walking aid?

- If you are at all unsure which walking aid will meet your needs, see a physiotherapist.

Where the aid will be used

- Will you use it on rough or uneven ground / outdoors / on different types of floor surfaces / indoors only?
- Are there steps?
- Is there enough space to move easily through doorways, and in and around the toilet and bathroom?

Transport and storage

- Can you lift it in and out of the car?
- Does it fold or come apart easily?

Other helpful suggestions

- Remove obstacles, such as loose mats and clutter, to allow clear and easy access.
- Using other equipment around the home may help to improve your independence. Your treating occupational therapist can help you to decide what equipment you need, or you can call ILC Tas.
- Install grab rails or modify parts of the home which are difficult to access, e.g. steps.

Contact ILC Tas for more information



Ring **1300 885 886** to speak to a health professional



Visit our website www.iltas.asn.au or email us at ilc@iltas.asn.au



Make an appointment to visit our centre at **275 Wellington Street, South Launceston**



Ring us to find out when we will be visiting your area

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